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AUSTRALIA'S NEW PARLIAMENT HOUSE

This article has been contributed by the Parliament House Construction Authority.

A symbol of the future is taking shape on Capital Hill in Canberra, the national capital. It is Australia's dramatic new Parliament House, considered by many to be one of the most memorable and exciting architectural projects being undertaken anywhere in the world at this time.

HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

The project started in 1979 with the architectural design competition which attracted world wide interest. From 329 entries, ten were selected as prizewinners, five of these subject to further development in the second stage of the competition. The winner was announced on 26 June 1980. It was entry 177 and, at the announcement, the hitherto secret identity of the architectural team behind the submission was revealed. Australian born Richard Thorp was the nominated architect from the American based Mitchell/Giurgola practice. The clarity of the novel design concepts, as formulated under the leadership of Romaldo Giurgola, earned high praise from experts and lay people alike.

In following the extensive competition brief and in trying to meet all the requirements for a functional Parliament House, the design team also paid considerable attention to the original plans for the city of Canberra by its designer, Walter Burley Griffin. Through skilled combination of his intentions and Parliament's modern day requirements, the architects provided a building with the Senate to the east where Burley Griffin's first plan showed the Governor-General's residence and the House of Representatives to the west where the Prime Minister's Lodge was notionally placed by Griffin. Between the two Houses lies the central core of the building enclosed within two large 'boomerang' walls. This core provides the common facilities for both Houses, including the public and ceremonial areas to the northern end and the executive government, committee and library areas to the south.

In the vertical scheme of the building, a similar pattern is found. The basement provides essential services, store areas, plant rooms and the main kitchen. The ground floor is the principal parliamentary and ceremonial floor. It is on this level that the main entry through to the Foyer and Reception Hall lies; whilst, in the heart of the building, the Members' Hall and the two Chambers extend upwards to public gallery levels on the first floor. General circulation levels for staff are on the second floor.

The design

The design of the building has been an evolutionary process. It commenced with the original requirements (as established by the Parliament) based on a survey of the users of the building: it extended through the competition stage and the post competition review referred to as the Schematic Design Report, and culminated in the Developed Design Report, which outlined in detail all aspects of the building. Construction drawings represent the last stage in the process and are being prepared progressively to meet the building programme for each zone or specific trade.

It is a tribute to the skills of the architectural team that so few changes to the original competition entry have been required in the development of the design.

Construction

The construction of the project, like its design, is basically the responsibility of the specially formed Parliament House Construction Authority, set up to design and construct the new Parliament House. This small but expert organisation has attracted highly skilled specialists to supervise the project. The liaison with Parliament is by way of the Joint Standing Committee on the new Parliament House and with Government through the Minister for Territories and Local Government. Actual construction is carried out by individual contractors engaged directly by the Authority, and actual design work by specialist consultants working either directly for the Authority or engaged by the architects. The four principal consultants are the architects, the construction manager, the project planners and the cost planners.

Work on the new Parliament House started in January 1981, when large earthmoving vehicles arrived to cut the top of Capital Hill away and replace much of it around the base to form a building plateau. This nine month operation moved over one million cubic metres of soil with about ten per cent of it being transported from the site for use in a variety of reclamation works in Canberra.

The start of actual construction took place in November 1981 at the foundation level of the Forecourt. However, the relatively slow start at the end of 1981 soon accelerated rapidly through 1982 as the building started to emerge from the foundations, changing the skyline of Capital Hill.

The structure is reinforced concrete poured on-site, with extensive use of pre-cast panels made off-site for the office areas of the Senate, Representatives and executive wings.

Extensive use is being made of Australian materials, including granite for paving and walls, timber in furniture, floors and walls, and carpets in the working areas of the building.

Careful thought has gone into the energy use of the building and advances in technology will allow a central computer to control the building environment, fire protection and lighting.

The working conditions in the new building will be similar to those already existing in modern commercial offices and a far cry from the cramped and uncomfortable accommodation the present Parliament House building provides.

Externally, the building will harmonise well with the city by fitting in logically with the original Burley Griffin style and through skilled landscaping to provide formal garden areas near the building and more traditional Australian "bush settings" near the perimeter of the site.

Steady construction progress during the early part of the project has been achieved with the twin objectives of completing the project by 1988 and working to the original budget of \$220 million in May 1978 financial terms. May 1978 prices were used in all cost estimates and provide a

permanent reference to ensure the project remains on budget in real terms, allowing only for the effects of inflation and any additional requests by Parliament.

The building has been a major boost to the building industry in Canberra and elsewhere, with an expected peak employment directly on-site of 1,300 people, and with significantly more off-site employment in supply and allied industries. In statistical terms, the project is expected to use 20,000 tonnes of steel, 180,000 cubic metres of concrete and already over half this amount has been incorporated into the structure.

The site is 640 metres in diameter, covers 32 hectares and lies approximately 590 metres above sea level. The roof of the new building 616 metres above sea level, while the tall flagmast will rise a further 80 metres and carry a flag 10 metres by 5 metres. The maximum depth of excavation from the summit of the original hill was 21 metres.

Proposed Completion Date

The project is planned to allow the official opening in 1988 as part of the bicentennial celebrations. However, the building will appear finished externally in 1985 and be ready for gradual occupation from around the middle of 1987.

The building has already attracted considerable attention and when it becomes the new Parliament House of Australia, it will close a chapter of Australia's Parliamentary history in temporary buildings, and open the new era of Australian Parliamentary life in modern, permanent, spacious surroundings.

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